

Simplified Sitting Instructions for Mini Retreat

Setting your intention to gather and stabilize the mind

Breath Slowing – 20 minutes

Breathing deeply and slowly with the diaphragm, making the outbreath longer than the inbreath will automatically lead to deepening relaxation. Repeated stimulation of the vagus nerve during the long exhalations shifts the nervous system toward a more restful state, resulting in positive physical changes like a lower heart rate and a decrease in blood pressure. We begin the practice with intentional breath slowing, relaxing the body deliberately on each outbreath and focusing on the physical sensations produced in the body with the breath. Our mind starts to wander, and our mindfulness lets us notice that we aren't attending to the breath anymore. We bring our awareness back to the breath again and again. One tactic to improve focus is to use a breath count. Some traditions count several breaths and then start over, while others count during the breath. Experiment with the counting strategies and then select one and stick with it for a while. The aspiration is to just be with each breath. Practice will improve your focus.

Walk Slowly for 10 minutes mindfully, keep the breath in mind and notice the sensory experience that occurs in this moment.

Body Scan – 30 Minutes

Progressive Relaxation Training was one of the earliest western techniques that was explicitly developed to train people to recognize the difference between muscles that were tense and muscles that were relaxed. My clinical experience is that most people don't need the tense component because their body awareness is good enough and just noticing the tension leads them to spontaneously relax. The Buddhist tradition has been using body scans to focus the mind and relax the body for 2½ thousand years. There are several variations on the theme of body scans. It is better to pick one for each sitting and stick with it but you may pick a different one for a different sitting. You can scan either slowly or quickly, starting either at the head or the feet. You can scan for the elements of air, fire, water, and earth. You can also simply sweep the awareness throughout the whole body, relaxing with each breath. You can sense the breath in our bodies as clouds of energy that fill the whole body on the inbreath and empty and soften the whole body on the outbreath. Again, the goal is to develop deep relaxation by focusing and becoming absorbed in the experience. Keep bringing the mind back to body relaxation when it wanders.

Walk slowly for 15 minutes with more focus on the relaxation you can experience in your sensory body.

Inclining the mind to what is pleasant, wholesome, and leading to happiness – 45 Minutes.

As you relax more and more deeply, you may find it easy to get in touch with the experience of pleasantness in the body. The objective is to allow the pleasant sensations to spread over your whole body and for you to become so absorbed in them, that pleasantness and well-being are the prominent sensations. Seeing colored lights or pillars of light are simply signals that you are absorbed and might enter the first *jhana*. However, if you are **not** doing *jhana* practice and are just interested in relaxation, you may simply enjoy the capacity of your mind to experience well-being. This will add energy to your body budget and improve the brain's capacity to default to pleasant and wholesome experiences rather than unpleasant ones. Loving kindness can bubble up in these states of happiness and we can experience a deeper self-acceptance and connection with others.

Walk slowly, cultivating the pleasure of walking and concentration for 15 minutes.